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Release No. 0441.09

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AGRICULTURE DEPUTY SECRETARY MERRIGAN ANNOUNCES INITIATIVE TO CONNECT CHILDREN TO WHERE THEIR FOOD COMES FROM AND PROVIDE MORE LOCAL FOODS IN SCHOOL LUNCHES

*New Farm-to-School Tactical Teams Will Assist School Administrators Transition to
Purchasing More Locally Grown Foods as Part of USDA's 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your
Food Initiative'*

WASHINGTON, Sept. 15, 2009 – Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan today announced a new initiative to better connect children to their food and create opportunities for local farmers to provide their harvest to schools in their communities as part of USDA's 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative. USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) will team together and form 'Farm to School Tactical Teams' to assist school administrators as they transition to purchasing more locally grown foods. The agencies will also issue updated common-sense purchasing guidance to schools so they can buy fresh, locally grown produce for students eating through USDA's school nutrition programs. Food and Nutrition Service Administrator Julie Paradis made the announcement on Merrigan's behalf at the Homegrown School Lunch Week Kickoff in Hanover, Md.

"It is important that our children have access to healthy, nutritious food and our focus on enabling schools to purchase local produce will provide opportunities for local producers," said Merrigan. "This will enable greater wealth creation in communities by allowing producers to build their capacity by serving local institutional customers like schools."

USDA's Farm-To-School Tactical Teams will soon begin touring America's school cafeterias to identify challenges and opportunities to help them transition to purchasing more locally grown foods. The team will work with local farmers, local and state authorities, school districts, and community partners to develop Farm-To-School projects and provide assistance on the best ways to buy more local produce for the National School Lunch Program. USDA will partner with schools, the U.S. Department of Education and non-profits to develop and enhance these resources. Additional information will be made available soon.

This announcement is just one component of USDA's 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative to help develop local and regional food systems and spur economic opportunity. By successfully restoring the link between consumers with local producers there can be new income opportunities for farmers and generate wealth that will stay in rural communities; a greater focus on sustainable agricultural practices; and families can better access healthy, fresh, locally grown food.